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RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON 0147
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1486
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 005732

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KPKO](#) [TH](#) [BM](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: A/S SILVERBERG DISCUSSES BURMA, DARFUR WITH THAI
MFA

REF: A. BANGKOK 5367

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 5392

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Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) The Burmese junta has clearly demonstrated a willingness to engage only with the UN and not with ASEAN, in discussions relating to international concerns over Burmese repression, according to MFA Permanent Secretary Virasakdi Futrakul. During a November 5 meeting with I/O Assistant Secretary Silverberg and the Ambassador, Virasakdi said that

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the RTG would not take a leading role in any kind of regional or international response to the Burmese crackdown. Regarding the possibility of ASEAN guiding a process of national reconciliation in Burma, Virasakdi referred to ASEAN statements of support for UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari. Thailand had offered advice to the Burmese junta over the past two months, he claimed. The generals responded with threats to the Thai Ambassador to Burma that Thailand would face "adverse reactions" if the RTG pursued the matter any further. At the end of the day, Virasakdi concluded, publicity and pressure applied by the UN were the best way to address the issue. The Ambassador and A/S Silverberg urged that Thailand not settle for anything short of real progress.

A/S Silverberg also thanked Virasakdi for offering troops for the UN peacekeeping mission in Darfur. END SUMMARY.

THAILAND TO TAKE A BACK SEAT IN BURMA SOLUTION

12. (C) On November 5, the Ambassador and I/O Assistant Secretary Silverberg, in Bangkok to address the situation in

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Burma, met with Thai MFA PermSec Virasakdi. Virasakdi explained that as a member of ASEAN, Thailand preferred to follow the consensus of the organization, especially on matters related to one of its members. In the case of Burma, the RTG went along with the ASEAN chair's statement of support for Gambari's efforts.

13. (C) Silverberg pointed out that the Burmese junta continued to flout the efforts of the UN and questioned Virasakdi as to why ASEAN persisted in protecting Burma. He replied that it was a matter of principle and procedure. There was no consensus within ASEAN to expel Burma from the organization, and even if there had been, there existed no procedure to do so. The heads of government would likely discuss Burma in a closed meeting at the ASEAN Summit later this month, he surmised. Silverberg inquired whether the RTG or ASEAN had any hope that private urgings to Burma would have any effect. Virasakdi conceded that, although the Burmese delegation would listen to advice from ASEAN, he could not be sure of the extent of ASEAN influence. By way of example, Virasakdi recounted how the junta had summoned the Thai Ambassador to Naypyidaw after the RTG sent letters to the junta regarding the current crisis. At each meeting, the Burmese used strong language to warn the Thai Ambassador that continued meddling in Burma's internal affairs would result in adverse reactions from the GOB (ref A). Virasakdi indicated that such retaliation could include Burma closing its 2,400 kilometer border with Thailand, critically

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affecting trade and the border populations.

14. (C) How did Thailand envision supporting Gambari's mission, queried Silverberg, if Gambari had no control over his schedule, received limited access to opposition members, and overall had little to show for his efforts. Virasakdi countered that Gambari's presence in Burma improved the leverage of the UN and was important to facilitating the engagement of the international community. Silverberg cautioned that Gambari's visits should not substitute for real progress. Virasakdi seemed to agree, and mentioned that at present the ASEAN Secretary General was discussing the idea of a 'Friends of Gambari' group at the UN, to include ASEAN, to support Gambari's efforts. As Virasakdi understood, Gambari had expressed interest in the concept, but awaited details. In addition, Singapore was considering inviting Gambari to this month's ASEAN Summit, and was in the process of sounding out other ASEAN members' views. Virasakdi expressed concern that the Burmese may interpret these two proposals as ASEAN "ganging up on them."

DARFUR SUPPORT

15. (C) At the conclusion of the meeting, Silverberg thanked the RTG for agreeing to send a battalion of troops to support the peace mission in Darfur. However, the U.S. was concerned about the deployment schedule, she said. Virasakdi replied that the RTG had already informed the UN that Thai troops would be ready by the end of 2007.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) Thai officials are offering assurances that they too want to see democratic change in Burma, but it is clear they prefer to let others lead the way so as not to face the uncomfortable position of publicly confronting the junta. Ref B reported one of the MFA's Burma experts explaining Thailand's desire for the UN to take the lead. Virasakdi was quick to point out to us that the influence the West once held over the GOB has been severely marginalized in recent years. Yet he did not address what it would take to prompt Thailand or ASEAN to use its influence to press the Burmese regime to undertake meaningful reforms. End comment.

¶7. (U) I/O Assistant Secretary Silverberg did not have the opportunity to clear this cable.
BOYCE